

# Lodge chimney stands the test of time

All alone amongst the dirt, debris and diesel smoke kicked up by the industrial equipment working to construct a modern housing development above Lackamas Lake, stands a three-story high chimney.

Soon covering the dirt and debris will be a host of new homes that symbolize all the modern amenities of life in the late 20th century. But once standing guard at this spot over the lake was a palatial country estate that captured the essence of the "Roaring Twenties."

All that remains of the Fern Prairie Lodge now though, is a chimney that vented a fireplace which at one time could hold nearly a cord of wood.

The Fern Prairie Lodge was built in the early part of the current century by a team of workers led by Severt Ostenson. The log structure was built as a summer recreation home for Frederick and Carolyn Pittock Leadbetter.

Mabel (Ostenson) Pickett of Washougal remembers fondly the great estate her father built near Lackamas Lake. Pickett and her family moved to the lodge when she was 4-years-old.

The lodge stood across the lake from the Leadbetter home which today is one of Camas' historical treasures. However, Pickett said the Leadbetters didn't really live there. She said it was only a home for Henry Pittock.

In what was definitely a Leadbetter home, Pickett's father crafted much of the furniture that decorated the lodge. Pickett said that her father selected only the finest cedar to construct tables and cabinets. Ostenson also used the fine wood to form the base, headboards and footboards for the dozens of beds throughout the home.

The multitudes of hand-crafted furniture was put to use frequently by the Leadbetters. Known as the aristocracy of the period, the Leadbetters regularly entertained upwards of 60 guests. Pickett recalled one Saturday night in which 26 of the home's beds were occupied.

With considerable work to keep up with thanks to the ever-circulating crop of guests, Pickett had much to do in her years at the lodge. When she was 16, Pickett was hired to take care of the bedrooms, cook when the full-time cook took a day off and even chauffeur when the normal driver was unavailable.

Although today she is unsure of how she completed such a task when she worked for the Leadbetters, Pickett said that she was charged with cooking six and seven course

meals when the regular cook took a day off.

The task she especially enjoyed was standing in as chauffeur. The job gave Pickett the chance to drive the Leadbetter's Packard and Hudson. In addition, she also got the chance to drive the family's 16 Cylinder Cadillac once. She mused that the engine was as long as most of today's cars.

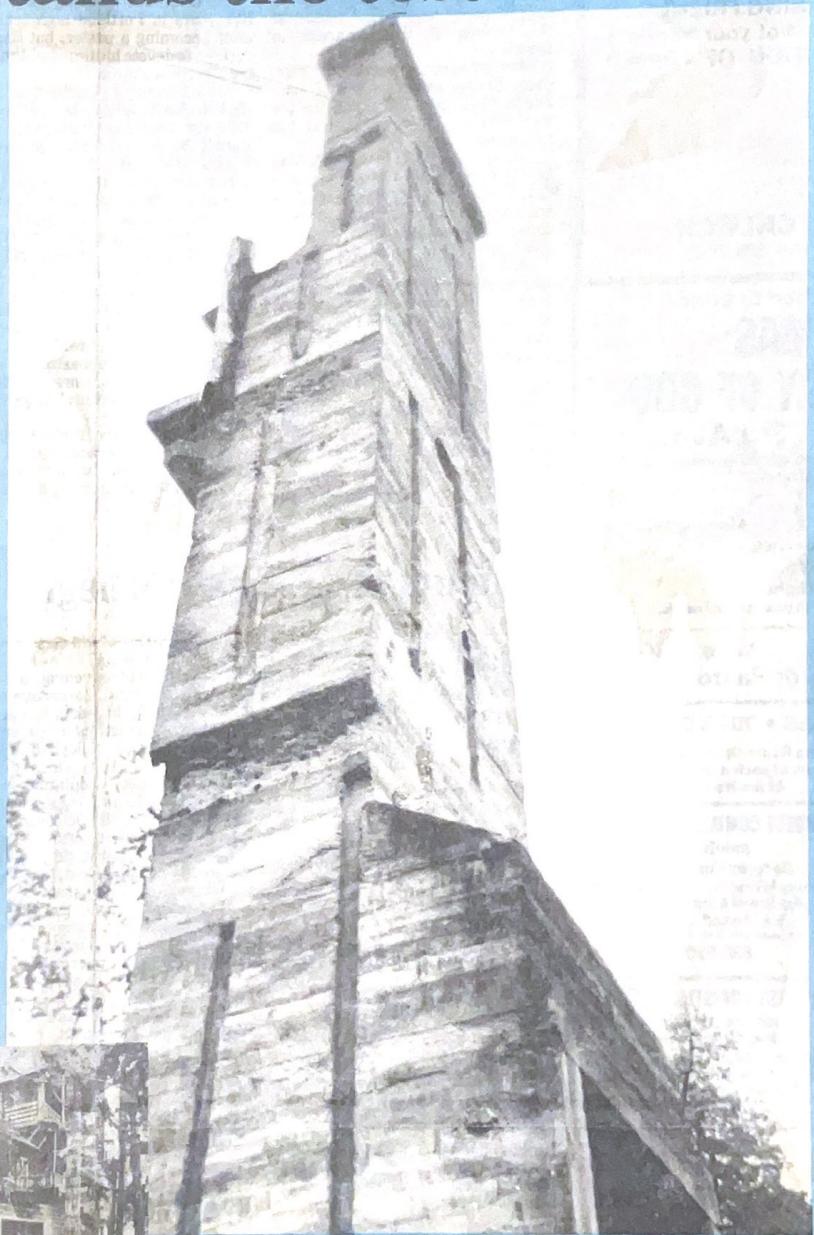
Pickett said that she even drove Frederick Leadbetter's personal car: a Chrysler 80 Roadster. She said that to her knowledge, she was the only person other than Leadbetter to drive the classic automobile. Adding a side note to the car, Pickett said that because Leadbetter was an "impatient man," he always drove fast.

Another habit that Leadbetter had was sleeping both inside and outside at night, said Pickett. He would spend part of the night in an inside bedroom and part of the night outside on one of the balconies that surrounded the lodge.

Pickett also has other stories to tell about the great lodge. Not wanting to pass on the style of the 1920s, the Leadbetters constantly threw parties. Some were thrown solely by the Leadbetter children. "They had some pretty wild shin-digs," said Pickett.

Six decades later, like the "Roaring Twenties," about all that remains is the memories. Because the wood used as the structure for the house was never treated, it crumbled away until eventually it was removed completely. But there is one piece that remains: standing against the back-drop of Lackamas Lake is the chimney that refuses to yield to the pressures of time.

Story by  
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A POSTCARD of the old Fern Prairie Lodge shows a little of the detail that went into the construction of the structure. Time and the elements eventually dissipated the Leadbetter recreation home. (Historical photo submitted by Mabel Pickett)